

# COLTS interested in PennDOT natural gas fuel initiative

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*Published: October 5, 2014*

The County of Lackawanna Transit System is among the first volunteers for a new state Department of Transportation plan to let private companies sell compressed natural gas fuel at public transportation hubs around Pennsylvania.

The idea is to create public-private partnerships during which developers design, build, finance, operate and maintain compressed natural gas fueling stations at as many as 37 transit facilities statewide.

Public transit agencies like COLTS would be customers, along with anyone in the public who is looking to refuel with compressed natural gas to take advantage of the abundant, clean-burning natural resource.

“CNG vehicles have been introduced in a wide variety of commercial applications, from light-duty trucks and sedans ... to heavy-duty vehicles like transit buses, street sweepers and school buses,” according to the California Energy Commission.

The commission noted transit agency buses are among the state’s most visible vehicles that use compressed natural gas.

“If they choose us, we would definitely be interested,” said COLTS Executive Director Robert Fiume. “We have about 15 hybrid buses, and we would like to diversify our fleet.”

Mr. Fiume has long been interested in the alternative fuel source and envisioned replacing or retrofitting about 20 of the transit system’s 35 buses to save money on fuel, help the environment and encourage the region’s natural gas boom.

COLTS has qualified for \$6 million in matching funding through the Redevelopment Assistance and Capital Program to support the natural gas conversion, although the agency would still need to apply to get the funding released.

Mr. Fiume expected it to be a \$12 million project if COLTS had to build its own fueling station, but even if a developer covers the cost of a fueling station, Mr. Fiume said the agency still would have to spend money to adapt its facilities to serve compressed natural gas-powered buses and vans.

Given the agency’s longstanding interest in compressed natural gas, COLTS could be a good candidate to participate in the initiative, PennDOT spokesman Rich Kirkpatrick said.

PennDOT officials hope to garner a portion of the fuel sales revenue at the sites, and return the money to transit agencies to help fund capital improvement.

PennDOT officials expect to invite teams to submit specific proposals early in 2015 and hope to select a project team in summer 2015.

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